DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 260 482 CS 505 039

AUTHOR Vogel, Joyce; And Others
TITLE An Examination of Conversational Skill in Accepted and Rejected Children.
PUB DATE Apr 85
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (Toronto, Ontario, Canada, April 25-28, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Childhood Attitudes; *Communication Apprehension; *Communication Research; Comparative Analysis; Grade 3; *Interpersonal Communication; *Interpersonal Competence; Listening; *Peer Relationship; Primary Education; *Self Esteem
IDENTIFIERS *Conversation

ABSTRACT

It is generally believed that the reason some children do not have satisfactory peer relationships is that they lack or will not use the interpersonal skills necessary to initiate and/or maintain such relationships. On the basis of this belief, a study was conducted to examine the conversational behavior of accepted and rejected children in a situation where conversation was the sole interpersonal activity. Subjects were 80 third-grade children divided into 16 accepted dyads, 12 rejected dyads, and 12 mixed status dyads. The videotaped conversations of the 40 dyads included conversation during a 2-minute waiting period, and a 4-minute conversational period during which the children were instructed to talk about a topic of their choice. These were then transcribed and analyzed. The results indicated that dyads of accepted children showed greater indication of listening and interest in engaging the other person in conversation than did the dyads of rejected children when weighted against incidence of not listening. The status effects observed were consistent with findings from other studies that characterize accepted children as being more prosocial and less antagonistic than rejected children. These data also provide support for social skills training programs. (HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED260482

An Examination of Conversational Skill In Accepted and Rejected Children

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Joyce Vogel

Kodiak Island Mental Health Center

Kodiak, AK

Susan Phillips Keane

University of North Carolina-Greensboro

Greensboro, NC

Judith Cohen Conger

Purdue University

West Lafayette, IN

CS505039

SS# 347-54-7638

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Joyce Vogel

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ABSTRACT

Conversations of forty pairs of third graders were transcribed and analyzed for the occurrence of seventeen categories of verbal behavior that were thought to index the process of listening to, paying attention to, or indicating interest in the other member of the dyad. Members of each dyad were of the same sex and were paired according to sociometric status so that either both members were accepted, both rejected, or one member accepted and one rejected. Conversations were transcribed from videotaped interactions of these dyads as they occurred in an experimental room during a two-minute waiting period and a four-minute conversational period. Trained raters coded the transcribed conversations for the frequency of occurrence of each category of behavior under investigation. The eight categories with the highest reliability were subjected to a series of multivariate analyses of variance. Significant main effects were found for the independent variables examined, i.e., sociometric status, sex and situation. Results are interpreted in terms of the developmental literature on social interaction and previous social skills research.

BACKGROUND

At a theoretical level, there is a general belief that the reason some children lack satisfactory peer relationships is that they lack the skills necessary to initiate and/or maintain them or, in the case of other children, they may have the necessary skills, but just do not act on those skills. In either case, the premise is that problematic peer relationships arise from the failure to engage in behavior which would lead to the formation or maintenance of satisfactory peer relationships. Thus the task of research becomes one of defining what that behavior is or, in other words, defining the specific components of social skill in children (Asher & Renshaw, 1981; Conger & Conger, in press; Morrison & Bellack, 1981).

But while much has been learned in regard to components of social skill in children, much remains to be learned. For example, the relationship between specific conversational behaviors and social skills in children has only recently begun to be explored and has been limited to the study of talk as it relates to play activity or entry into a group of children at play (Dodge, 1983; Dodge, Schlundt, Schocken & Delugagh, 1982; Putallaz, 1983; Putallaz & Gottman, 1981). However, children do converse in contexts other than play and there is evidence that by adolescence and adulthood the ability to listen and communicate interest in the other person does affect judgments of interpersonal attraction and social skill when conversation is the sole interpersonal activity (Conger, Wallander, Mariotto, & Ward, 1980; Coulthard, 1977; Kupke, Hobbs, & Cheney, 1979;

Norton, 1983). Thus, the current project seeks to examine the conversational behavior of accepted and rejected children where conversation is the sole interpersonal activity and as it reflects the process of listening, paying attention and indicating interest in the other person.

AIM

The purpose of this investigation was to examine the conversational behavior of accepted and rejected children in a situation where conversation was the sole interpersonal activity. Behaviors of interest included all those that were thought to reflect the process of listening, paying attention and indicating interest in the conversational partner.

Question I. Do accepted and rejected children display differences in the conversational behaviors under examination?

Question II. Is there a sex effect, regardless of status type, in the conversational behaviors under examination?

Question III. Does conversational behavior vary as a function of situation (i.e., waiting period vs. structured conversation)?

METHOD

Subjects

Eighty third grade children who had been grouped according to classroom sociometric status to form three types of same-sex dyads (both members accepted, both members rejected, and one member accepted, one member rejected) served as subjects in this study. The children attended different classrooms from within the same school and, according to self-report, were relatively unfamiliar age-mates. From these 80 children the following dyads were formed: 16 accepted dyads (8 male; 8 female), 12 rejected dyads (8 male, 4 female) and 12 mixed status dyads (8 male, 4 female). The smaller number female dyads was due to the inability to find more than 12 rejected girls in the original sample (N = 307).

Procedure

The videotaped conversations of the 40 dyads included conversation during a 2-minute waiting period and a 4-minute conversational period during which the children were instructed to talk about a topic of their choice. For pragmatic reasons, the waiting period always preceded the conversational period. Undergraduate research asssitants were trained to transcribe the videotaped conversations and were instructed to copy, verbatim, everything the children said, viewing the videotapes as many times as was necessary in order to obtain an accurate transcript. The accuracy of each transcript was checked by the first author.

Additional undergraduate assistants were trained to use the first author's coding system and, after they achieved an acceptable level of reliability with that author, they each coded a random subset of transcripts. Reliability checks were made on approximately one-third of the transcripts given to the coders. All persons were blind to the sociometric status of the children whose conversations they were coding. Coders also wrote out, in brief form, each topic introduced throughout the transcript, who introduced it and the sequence in wh.ch it was introduced.

RESULTS

The eight categories with the highest reliability were selected for further analysis (see Table 1). The raw frequency of occurrence of each of those categories was then transformed into a proportion based upon the number of opportunities for that category to occur. This was necessary in order to control for differences in the frequency of occurrence of each category that were due only to differences in the number of opportunities for that category to occur. Proportions for each category for each individual within a dyad were averaged to yield dyad means for each category.

Dyad means were subjected to two 2(sex) x 3(status) x 2(situations) MANOVAS. They first tested the notion that status groups would differ along the dimension of listening and interest in the other person versus not listening and lack of interest. To do this, the 8 categories were divided into either positive or negative indications of listening or interest and dyad means for these two composite categories (called POS and NEG) were subjected to a 2 x 3 x 2 MANOVA. In the second MANOVA, dyad means for each of the 8 categories were entered separately. Results are shown in Tables 2-4.

DISCUSSION

1. Accepted dyads showed greater indication of listening and interest in engaging the other person in conversation than rejected dyads, when weighed against the incidence of not listening. In fact, it was only this *a priori* classification of variables that produced a significant status effect. A subsequent analysis of the eight component variables did not yield any other composite that could discriminate status groups.

The status effects observed for POS, NEG, and POS minus NEG (or net positive behavior) are consistent with findings from other studies that characterize accepted children as being more prosocial and less antagonistic than rejected children. The status effects in the current study additionally show that the communication of listening and interest as a conversational skill does vary among 9-10 year old children and the fact that the greatest difference was found between accepted and rejected children established the relevance of that process as a potential component of social skill. Thus, data from the current study also provide validational support for those social skills training programs that are already training such verbal skills as listening and appropriate question-asking and suggest a set of other conversational behaviors (e. g., interruptions, changing topics, "you" statements, answering questions) that need to

be examined for a causal relationship with social skill in children.

2. Interpretation of the composite that provided the main effect for sex is difficult. The composite could not be interpreted in terms of any subset of the variables involved in the composite, nor could it be interpreted as talk time or total behavioral output. One possible explanation is that the composite is reflecting maturity of conversational style, based on the direction of the results and a logical relationship that can be posited between conversational maturity and the 8 variables in the composite. Assuming that interpretation, dyad means indicate that girls had a more adult-like conversational style than boys.

3. The significant main effect for situation was due to the category of behavior that measured the number of topics introduced about the experimental setting relative to the total number of topics introduced. On the average, 37% of topics introduced during the waiting period were about some aspect of the experimental setting compared to 21% during the conversational period. The reactivity of the setting observed in the current study demonstrates the need to give careful consideration to the design of studies that are going to look at the content of children's conversations or that hope to capture naturalistic behavior in an analogue setting.

REFERENCES

Asher, S. R., & Renshaw, P. D. (1981). Children without friends: Social knowledge and social skill training. In S. R. Asher & J. M. Gottman (Eds.), The development of children's friendships. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Conger, J. C., & Conger, A. J. (in press). Components of heterosocial skill. In Curran & Monti (Eds.), Social competence and psychiatric disorders: Theory and practice. Guilford Press.

Conger, A. J., Wallander, J. L., Mariotto, M. J., & Ward, D. (1980). Peer judgments of heterosexual-social anxiety and skill: What do they pay attention to anyhow? Behavioral Assessment, 2, 243-259.

Coulthard, M. (1977). An introduction to discourse analysis. London: Longman.

Dodge, K. A. (1983). Behavioral antecedents of peer social status. Child Development, 54, 1386-1399.

Dodge, K. A., Schlundt, D. G., Schocken, I., & Delugagh, J. D. (submitted for publication). Social competence and children's sociometric status: The role of peer group entry strategies.

Kupke, T. E., Hobbs, S. A., & Cheney, T. H. (1979). Selection of heterosocial skills. Behavior Therapy, 10, 327-335.

Morrison, R. L., & Bellack, A. S. (1981). The role of social perception in social skill. Behavior Therapy, 12, 69-79.

Norton, R. (1983). Communicator style. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Putallaz, M. (1983). Predicting children's sociometric status from their behavior. Child Development, 54, 1417-1426.

Putallaz, M., & Gottman, J. M. (1981). An interactional model of children's entry into peer groups. Child Development, 52, 986-994.

TABLE 1

Code Categories and Abbreviated Definitions[a]

Positive Indications of Listening or Interest During Conversation

[b]
* MINIMAL VERBAL ACTIVITY also known as backchannel responses

* AFFIRMATION or acknowledgement of what has been said as in the other person saying that he got a new bike and the response is "wow" or "neat"

RESTATEMENT in second person of what the other person just said

REFLECTION of a feeling implied or stated in the other person's statement

ECHOING or repeating a word from the other person's communication which is not reframed in second person

MIRRORING a gesture made by the other person

FINISHING A SENTENCE OR STORY begun by the other person without interrupting to do so

* ASKING A QUESTION 1) about the other person

2) not about the other person

3) request for elaboration or clarification of something that the other person just said

* OTHER STATEMENTS meaning statements using the words "you" or "your"

Negative Indications of Listening or Interest During Conversation

ASKING A QUESTION 1) which suggests that none of what had been said was understood

2) but not giving the other person an opportunity to reply

FINISHING A SENTENCE OR STORY begun by the other person, but interrupring to do so

* FAILURE TO TIE communication to content contained in previous speaker's communication and, in addition, interrupting to do so

* INTERRUPTION of the other person while s/he is talking and that is not otherwise coded

* TOPICS DISTRACTIBLE meaning introducing a topic which focuses conversation on something in the room, thereby detracting from conversation as a purely interpersonal focused activity

a Intraclass reliability ranged from .908 - .984

b *Code categories used in the analyses

TABLE 2

Multivariate Main Effect for Status ($F(4,66) = 2.41$, $p = .058$)

Dependent Variable	Discriminant Function Coefficients
POS	.65
NEG	-.65

Univariate F-tests for Main Effect of Status

Dependent Variable	F	P
POS	3.111	.057
NEG	3.127	.057
POS-NEG	5.065	.012

TABLE 3

Multivariate Main Effect for Sex ($F(8,27) = 2.37$, $p = .045$)

Dependent Variable	Discriminant Function Coefficients	Correlation with Canonical Variable
MVA + AF	-.634	-.271
QP	-.031	.070
AQ	.260	.261
OTH	.610	.222
QMCI	-.48	-.437
FT	-.515	-.271
I	-.557	-.352
TOPD	-.159	-.134

TABLE 4

Multivariate Main Effect for situation ($F(8,73) = 3.65$, $p = .001$)

Dependent Variable	Discriminant Function Coefficients	Correlation with Canonical Variable
MVA + AF	.159	.302
QP	-.149	-.237
AQ	-.273	-.342
OTH	.002	.000
QMCI	.264	.172
FT	-.311	-.215
I	-.296	-.266
TOPD	.824	.768

TABLE

Reliability Statistics for Code Categories

Category	Kappa	Intraclass
Minimal Verbal Activity plus Affirmation[1]	.846	.984[2]
Restatement	--[3]	--
Reflection	--	--
Question About Other Person	.888	.969
Question Not About Other Person	.823	.904
Question No Opportunity to Reply	.538	.529
Request Message Clarification Type 1	.932	.983
Request Message Clarification Type 2	.605	.637
Answer to Question	.869	.969
Other Statements	.787	.908
Finishing Sentence or Story Type 1	.613	.376
Finishing Sentence or Story Type 2	.000	.000
Mirroring	.284	.444
Echoing	.496	.813
Failure to Tie	.757	.928
Interruption	.850	.981
Topics Distractible	.893	.976

[1] Data for these categories were combined because the first category occurred infrequently and appeared to blend somewhat with the second category

[2] Reliability of the average of all raters

[3] Value undefined, denominator equals zero